

making Islam one of our nation's fastest-growing religious. Through fasting and devoted reading of the Koran, Muslims strengthen their faith in God and deepen the compassion that gives their faith such dignity and power in the eyes of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. It is a time for renewing our spirituality and for recognizing our common humanity. It is a time to remember all that we have done and all that we have yet to do to make this world worthy of its Creator.

As the crescent moon rises, and the ninth month begins, Hillary joins me in extending best wishes to you and your families for health, prosperity, and happiness. May our prayers for a better world soon be answered.

Bill Clinton

NOTE: This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on the Military Strikes Against Iraq

December 18, 1998

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

At approximately 5:00 p.m. eastern standard time on December 16, 1998, at my direction, U.S. military forces conducted missile and aircraft strikes in Iraq in response to Iraqi breaches of its obligations under resolutions of the United Nations Security Council. The strikes will degrade Iraq's ability to develop and deliver weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and its ability to threaten its neighbors. This action, carried out in concert with military forces of the United Kingdom, enjoys the support of many of our friends and allies. It is consistent with and has been taken in support of numerous U.N. Security Council resolutions, including Resolutions 678 and 687, which authorize U.N. Member States to use "all necessary means" to implement the Security Council resolutions and to restore peace and security in the region and establish the terms of the cease-fire mandated by the Council, including those related to the destruction of Iraq's WMD programs.

United States strikes are ongoing. United States forces have targeted facilities that are actively involved in WMD and ballistic missile activities, or pose a threat to Iraq's neigh-

bors or to U.S. forces conducting this operation.

At the same time I ordered the strikes, I authorized the deployment of additional U.S. forces to Southwest Asia. These forces include U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, and U.S. Air Force units to reinforce those forces already present in the region. These forces will remain in the region as long as is necessary to protect the national security interests of the United States.

I directed these actions pursuant to my authority under the Constitution as Commander in Chief and as Chief Executive, and to conduct U.S. foreign relations, as well as under the Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution (Public Law 102-1) enacted in January 1991.

I am providing this report as part of my efforts to keep the Congress fully informed, consistent with Public Law 102-1. I appreciate the support of the Congress as we continue to take all necessary steps to secure Iraqi compliance with U.N. Security Council resolutions.

Sincerely,

Bill Clinton

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Strom Thurmond, President pro tempore of the Senate. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Address to Arab Nations

December 19, 1998

Thank you for this opportunity to address America's friends throughout the Arab and the entire Islamic world. I want to explain why we have taken military action against Saddam Hussein, and why we believe this action is in the interests of the Iraqi people and all the people of the Middle East.

Saddam has ruled through a reign of terror against his own people and disregard for the peace of the region. His war against Iran cost at least half a million lives over 10 years. He gassed Kurdish civilians in northern Iraq. In 1990 his troops invaded Kuwait, executing those who resisted, looting the country, spilling tens of millions of gallons of oil into the Gulf, firing missiles at Saudi Arabia, Bahrain,

Israel, and Qatar. He massacred thousands of his own people in an uprising in 1991.

As a condition for the Gulf war cease-fire, Iraq agreed to disclose and to destroy its weapons of mass destruction and to demonstrate its willingness to live at peace with its neighbors. Iraq could have ended economic sanctions and isolation long ago by meeting these simple obligations. Instead, it has spent nearly 8 years defying them. Saddam has failed to disclose information about his weapons arsenal. He has threatened his neighbors and refused to account for hundreds of Kuwaitis still missing from 1991.

Each time Saddam has provoked a crisis, we've tried hard to find a peaceful solution, consulting our friends in the Arab world and working through the United Nations. A month ago we joined the other 14 members of the U.N. Security Council in demanding that Saddam come into compliance immediately. We supported what Iraq said it wanted: a comprehensive review of its compliance after it resumed full cooperation with the U.N. weapons inspectors. And we were gratified when eight Arab nations, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman, warned that Iraq would bear the blame—Iraq alone would bear the blame for the consequences of defying the U.N.

Now, I canceled a military strike when, at the last moment, Saddam promised to cooperate unconditionally with the inspectors. But this month he broke his promises again, and again defied the U.N. So, we had to act. Saddam simply must not be allowed to threaten his neighbors or the world with nuclear arms, poison gas, or biological weapons.

America understands that Saddam's first victims are his own people. That is why we exempted food and medicine when sanctions were imposed on Iraq. That is why, since 1991, we have offered to allow Iraq to sell its oil and use the proceeds to pay for humanitarian supplies. For 5 years, Saddam rejected that offer while building lavish palaces for himself and diverting resources to his military.

Finally, in 1996, Saddam allowed the oil-for-food program to take effect. Since then, the U.N. has delivered nearly \$3 billion worth of food and medicine to the Iraqi peo-

ple every year. Without the watchful eye of the U.N., we would soon see the oil-for-food program become oil-for-tanks, leading to less food for the Iraqi people and more danger for Iraq's neighbors.

No decision to use force is easy, especially at a time when I'm working so hard to build peace in the Middle East and to strengthen our own relations with the Arab world. My visit to Gaza last week reflected my deep commitment to the peace process. I will never forget the warm welcome I received from the Palestinian people, eager to shape their own future at last.

Let me also state my deep respect for the holy month of Ramadan. In the days ahead, I hope all Muslims will consider America's sincere desire to work with all people in the Middle East to build peace. We have the most profound admiration for Islam. Our dispute is with a leader who threatens Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

As the crescent moon rises, and the ninth month begins, Muslim-Americans—and all Americans—wish you the blessings of faith and friendship. May our prayers for a better world soon be answered.

Ramadan Kareem.

NOTE: This address was videotaped at approximately 12:20 p.m. in the Cabinet Room on December 18 for later broadcast on the U.S. Information Agency Worldnet. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 18 but was embargoed for release until 7 a.m. on December 19. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this address.

The President's Radio Address

December 19, 1998

Good morning. As I speak to you, America's men and women in uniform and our British allies are fighting for security, peace, and freedom in the Persian Gulf. They're doing an outstanding job, showing bravery and skill, making our country proud. Our thoughts and prayers are with them.

Putting our troops in harm's way is the hardest decision any President faces. I believe our action in Iraq clearly is in America's interest. Never again can we allow Saddam Hussein to develop nuclear weapons, poison